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METHODS TO ASSESS THE RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

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Abstract

In an era of speed and turbulences, a significant aspect in any organisation is the management of emergencies occurred as large-scale change challenges by implementing new cost reduction development and reorganisation strategies (J. P. Kotter, 2010, p. 11). The common practice proves that many organisations register failures. In relation to this aspect, J. P. Kotter (2010, p. 12) supports the idea that the biggest mistake made by any organisation when trying to change themselves is their failure to create a sense of emergency among a sufficient number of people in order to prepare the change. The assurance that the change solution will be accepted and implemented by the employees reveals the resistance to change.

The researches in the field (P. Collettere i G. Delisle, 1982, quoted by Céline Bareil and A. Savoie, 1999, p.87) underlined the fact that the resistance, under its various forms, starts to manifest along with the introduction of the idea of change and, most often, it persists, more or less intensively, during the entire implementation process and, sometimes, even after the completion of such process. Moreover, some researches revealed an aspect that confirms the **hypothesis according to which the employees' reactions to organisational change are not always carefully and accurately approached by the managers involved** in such organisation transformation projects (P. Collettere, G. Delisle i R. Perron, 1997, quoted by Céline Bareil and A. Savoie, 1999, p.87).

Although numerous works have been dedicated to the resistance to change, there are still theoretical gaps in this field. According to N. King (1990, quoted by Céline Bareil and A. Savoie, 1999, p.87), the majority of the psychological works that treated the organisational change examined the process only from the resistance point of view, without taking into account the complexity of the change addressees' reactions. Such a restrictive approach has, according to Céline Bareil and A. Savoie (1999, p.87), **a series of weaknesses** (gaps), such as:

Ñ Some surveys based on the above mentioned approach are not intended to assess the exact moment or the exact conditions of the resistance to change, stating that this phenomenon cannot be known (A. Brassard, 1998, quoted by Céline Bareil and A. Savoie, 1999, p.87);

Ñ The concept of resistance to change is not always operational, there being no reliable instruments to efficiently measure this resistance, in spite of some review grids created to offer a general resistance index;

Ñ The attempts to measure this resistance are, most often, made by a third party, who suffers, in its turn, the impact of this change therefore cannot be neutral, its assessment being a subjective one;

Ñ However, some managers are reluctant to approach the issue of resistance to change for fear of not amplifying this phenomenon, and a part of the employees do not express themselves openly, for fear of repercussions;

Ñ Sometimes though, the interventions suggested by various surveys require psychological interpretations and psychotherapeutic approaches (M.F.R. Kets de Vries, D. Miller, 1985, quoted by Céline Bareil and A. Savoie, 1999, p.87) that only few organisation leaders could afford.

Lately, numerous authors tried to exceed these approach limitations of the traditional approach of the resistance to change, by proposing an assessment of the results of the surveys dedicated to this subject, according to the better adjusted and more operational parameters. Among the new evolving tendencies in the resistance theories, there are the **dynamic patterns of the addressees' reactions**. These patterns contribute to finding a diagnostic and to foreseeing the addressees' reactions, behaviours and attitudes, considering the context and the factors that influence such reactions.

The dynamic patterns of addressees' reactions introduced us to the term of "*transition*" to describe the internal change assimilation process: "*When everybody speaks of change, transitions may lead to the success or to the failure of the organisational changes*" (W. Bridges, 1995, quoted by Céline Bareil and A. Savoie, 1999, p.87).

Celine Bareil and A. Savoie (1999, pp.87-88) have reviewed three types of dynamic patterns that describe human reactions to change:

1. **Cognitive-temporal approach of the change process.** This type of theoretical approach of organisational change was prepared by K.Lewin, and completed by E.H.Schein (1969, quoted by Céline Bareil and A.Savoie, 1999, p.88). Quoted by many scientific and professional works, the organisational change pattern of K.Lewin involves three phases described by the second chapter of our doctoral dissertation.
2. **Socio-emotional approach of the change process.** The dynamic patterns developed from this perspective explain the transition by socio-emotional processes and is based on a chronological series – reaction stages – of emotional responses, often starting by a refusal and continuing with sadness, guilt, confusion, revolt and engagement.
3. **Cognitive-affective approach of the change.** This approach is also known as the **theory (pattern) of worrying phases**. This pattern proves to be a promising way which allows the identification of realistic solutions to answer these questions. The worrying phase theory (Céline Bareil, 2004a; Céline Bareil and Savoie, 1999) limits “*a probable sequence of diversified worries related to any change and deems every addressee to be invited to experience normal and legitimate anxieties in front of a change*”. The authors of this theory confirm that each individual experience a certain tension between the will to change and his/her need of security, the novelty of the idea of change usually inspiring not so much an opposition, but generating more worries.

“The concept of worry (or anxiety) refers to a cognitive-affective construction,

expressing an experienced emotional reality and a state of discontent of the spirit which is oriented towards an object” (Céline Bareil, 2008, p.6). Numerous researches carried out to validate this concept confirmed that any person who suffers the impact of an organisational change would tend to follow the chronology of **seven phases of worrying** (Table 1).

The worrying phased pattern offers the possibility to actually listen to each employee, to separate the discourse from the team, to associate it to a worrying phase and to punctually and pertinently intervene, according to the need or anxiety felt at a certain point. This is an evolutionary pattern, based on an iterative process of listening and reacting of the organisation’s manager.

A.Vas (2005), S.K. Piderit (2000), E.B. Dent and S.G. Goldberg (1999a i 1999b), quoted by Céline Bareil (2008, p.4) disputed the classic perspective associated to the resistance to change, insisting on the importance of revising the resistance concept to allow a proper, more global understanding of the phenomenon. Other authors, among whom S. Oreg (2003, 2006), improved the measurement of the resistance by a three-dimensional “construct” also including the “*affective, cognitive and behavioural*” components, with the purpose of better understanding the employees’ subjective experience. During the same period, M.S.Orth (2002, quoted by Céline Bareil, 2008, p.4) developed a behavioural measurement pattern by similar reactions to change, considering **twenty answers** to measure **four constructs**:

- Active resistance;
- Passive resistance;
- Active support;
- Passive support.

Later, R. Soparnot (2006, p.107) proposed **four employee profiles** facing changes – the combatant, the observer, the conformist and the opportunist – according to the degree of engagement in the change

process (resistance or engagement) and to the degree of activity (passivity or activity).

Among the innovative works in this field, we count the doctoral thesis of C. Boffo (2005) who contributed to a **new conceptualisation of the resistance to change notion**. This is understood as an assembly of individual and evolutionary practices meant to adjust to change. In his approach, C. Boffo demystifies the concept of resistance, underlying the fact that very often the behaviours of individuals are constantly assessed according to the details sought by the promoters of the change and not according to the change itself. However, in reality, the addressee would react not only to a new idea brought to his/her attention, but he/she would also respond to the context (in his/her manner of doing and saying), to the contents and sense of the change, with the intention to objectify the idea of change launched by the promoter. In this promoter-addressee relation, the very idea of change might modify as it is developed, meaning that the addressees' reactions are not invariable, but, on the contrary, they would be contextualised and might vary during the change implementation process (Céline Bareil, 2008, p.5).

In the opinion of C. Boffo (2005, p. iv), there are **four types of practices to adjust to change**:

- **Rebel practices**, whereby the addressees tend to compromise the intentions of the promoters (generating failure);
- **Limited practices**, whereby individuals tend to marginalise the change;
- **Conformist practices**, whereby the users comply with every point of the change spirit;
- **Sophisticated practices**, which prove the creativity of the end users, focused on improving the change proposed by promoters.

C. Boffo stated that the rebel practices are not necessarily negative (they are oriented

towards an opposite direction from the promoters' intentions), they might evolve, at the same individual, from rebel to sophisticated practices, according to the promoter's openness degree.

Recently, a series of scientific works (Céline Bareil, 2004a; Céline Bareil, 2004b; Céline Bareil and Gagnon, 2005; Céline Bareil and Savoie, 1999a) try to find answers to a **series of questions** related to the **need to exceed the discomfort generated** by the organisations changes, **by a more humane management of the changes**:

- How to manage individuals in front of change in a more efficient manner?
- How to encourage change supporting behaviours (i.e. the sophisticated or conforming behaviours), trying to understand the resisting behaviours (the limited or rebel ones)?
- How can individuals be supported in order to face the change better?
- How can managers intervene to facilitate supporting behaviours?

Conclusions

The completion of the change involves the acknowledgement of the fact that the implementation of the organisational change is not only a matter of will but also a matter of resources differing from the daily operations. Without a formal mechanism, the change often appears as an overload, which does not exempt the employees from the current operations they are supposed to carry out. The management of the organisation expresses its vision related to change, and the pilotage team, especially appointed for this purpose, must formulate the change **in terms that allow the visualisation of its implementation**. In order to perform a change within an organisation, the management **must define the change as a project** with a start and an end point, appointing a person in charge, freed of

his/her current tasks, with assuring the application of the change.

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Table 1. Worrying phase to progress within the organisation change process

Worrying phases	Current and thematic phrases	Management priorities	Adjusting activities for the employee
1.No worry	<p><i>„I doubt this change has anything to do with me“.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuation of common projects and work habits. Little attention paid to the change. 	Precise communication and paying attention to the change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Asking questions. Searching for verifiable facts and data. Confronting smb’s position with smb else’s position. Recognising reactions.
2.Worries focused on the addressee	<p><i>„What will happen to me?“</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Egocentric worries related to the impact on the person and on his/her work: loss of the job, insecurity, loss of manager and colleagues, loss of power, of autonomy, of skills, incidents related to the work instruments and organisation. 	Listening and support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing smb’s worries to the proper persons. Searching for answers. Accepting the idea that the information might not be available Learning to manage the little interior voice.
3.Worries focused on the organisation	<p><i>„Will the change last?“</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worries related to the organisational consequences of the change on medium and long term. Questions related to the legitimacy of the change, to the organisational capacity to produce the change in time and question related to the engagement of the management. 	Proving the change seriousness and notions and confirming the means employed by the organisation to ensure a successful change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding the notions that motivate the change. Position against the change: stay passive or develop?
4.Worries focused on the change	<p><i>„What exactly is this change?“</i> <i>„How is it done?“</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worries related to the change scenario, to the quality of the implementation such change and to the allocated resources. 	Communication of the action plan, of the resources and attracting employees into participating to it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answering the questions who, when, how, with what? Change of experience with other persons who experienced the same type of change.
5.Worries focused ion experimenting	<p><i>„Will I be capable of ...?“</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worries relate to smb’s capacity to make the change, to the available support and to the understanding of the 	Facilitating the transfer of new competences: training, adjusting time, consultancy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing discomfort zone by the small steps technique. Clarifying the manager’s expectations. Expressing his/her

	line manager.		support needs in the technical and professional field.
6. Worries focused in the collaboration with somebody else	<p>„Who could gather us to collaborate in finding solutions and in transferring our new skills?“</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worries related to exchanges of experiences and collaborations with other teams, services, units, etc. 	Facilitating exchanges between the addresses and the development of an organisation adjusting to change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement into a committee. • Sharing skills and experiences. • Valorisation of his/her change experiences.
7. Worries focused in the continuous improvement of the change	<p>„How can we improve what the change is supposed to improve?“</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worries related to the improvements to be made for the change to operate better. 	Stimulating change improvement tracks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative to act as such, to innovate. • Follow up the original ways of doing things.

Source: Céline Bareil, 2008, pp. 6-7